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ABSTRACT

The history of the recent development of worker education in Australia and New Zealand shows that, in just the past 15 years or so, very significant improvements have occurred in delivery of trade union education. To a very large degree these developments took place because of the existence of a close relationship between the union movement and the Labor Party. Because of the willingness of the Labor Governments in both Australia and New Zealand to set up trade union education systems using federal funds, both countries have been able in a short time to set up systems that rival those of countries with long-established worker education programs. This generous funding has permitted the education movement to reach relatively large numbers of trade unionists in a short period of time. The New Zealand system requires employers to release union people from their jobs and give them paid educational leave to attend classes. The Australian program provides travel payments and subsidies for room and board that enable even small unions to send students even though distances are vast and air fares expensive. In both countries there is a shortage of trained and experienced worker educators, although the countries are dealing with the shortage by inservice training or hiring teachers with union backgrounds. The experience in Australia and New Zealand is quite different from that of the United States, where job training is dependent on tuition and small state subsidies. (KC)

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WORKER EDUCATION IN AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND

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This paper will attempt to trace the recent development of worker education in two countries quite remote from the rest of the so-called "Western World." In just the past 15 or so years, very significant improvements have occurred in delivery of trade union education. To a very large degree these developments took place because of the existence of a close relationship between the union movement and the Labour Party's. The experience in Australia and New Zealand is quite different from that of the United States, and for that reason is of great interest to worker educators in this country.

Australia

Australia is a country which is blessed by vast natural resources, what seems like an endless "outback," and a profusion of unions, most very small. In 1977, there were 281 unions with 2.8 million members, about 57% of the total employee labor force.[1] Most unions have fewer than five thousand members, although an effort is now on to force mergers of small unions form larger, more viable units. Their monthly union dues structures are very low, union staff are not well paid, generally speaking, and the technical services they can provide their members are few. Until the 1970s, few union officers and members had an opportunity to attend labor education courses and classes. Unions have limited funds for providing extensive education services for members and officers.

Like "Mother England", Australia had its own Worker Education Association (W.E.A), dating back to the pre-World War I period. It was set up to provide classes and courses for workers covering a wide variety of topics, but suffered from lack of funding and staff, and did not succeed in getting the support of a significant part of the labor movement, who saw in independent labor education a chance to inculcate an ideological bias among their membership.

Australia's independent labor education beginnings hark back to 1917, when The Victorian Labour College was set up in Melbourne by a "radical" parson and university student. It was housed in the Victorian Trades Hall in Melbourne, with no fees and teachers were drawn from the labor movement. It was based on the concept of class conflict, and held itself aloof from the then-existing university extension and W.E.A., pledging non-cooperation with those institutions. Since it had the support of many trade unions, it split off those

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organizations from the traditional British types of adult education organizations. Worker education outside of the unions themselves did not appear to prosper during the early years of the Twentieth Century.[2] Class conflict notions persist in the Australian labor movement to this day.

Of current interest is the Australian Trade Union Training Authority (TUTA), which was set up by the Whitlam Labour Government in the early Seventies and began operating around 1976. Federally funded (with a budget of A$8.8 million), it provided labor education centers in each state which had the task of developing grass-roots trade union leadership through community classes and courses of study offered in each State Center. In year 1986-87, TUTA trained more than 15,000 trade unionists through their state centers. This number had increased to 19,434 for year 1987-88.[3] Training is delivered mainly by TUTA instructors, although ad hoc instructors are also utilized. It is in the state worker education programs that basic training is provided. Each State Center has a Regional Council which functions as an advisory body. The Council provides unions with a means to shape the programs offered by each Center, since members of the Council are selected from labor organizations with membership in the State.

In addition to the state centers, TUTA's premier unit is Clyde Cameron College, a facility located in Albury-Wodonga, which has the objective of developing middle and high-level trade union leadership who have already been exposed to training at the various state centers. Clyde Cameron College is responsible for providing more advanced training including courses for full-time union representatives, industry development courses for those working in those types of activities, health and safety, union administration, journalism, organizing, grievance handling, research, conciliation and arbitration, and a variety of other tool courses for union leaders. courses are one and two weeks in length. Students are heavily subsidized, with the College picking up major parts of air fare and room and board charges. 1,650 students participated in courses at Clyde Cameron during 1986-87.[4] In 1987-88, this number had increased to 2,226.[5]

Clyde Cameron College sponsors a course for delegates from other Pacific Rim countries who want to learn about worker education, adult education, and how to deal with current problems. These activities have been growing in recent years, as have the number of industry-specific courses, which are gradually replacing general enrollment offerings. Safety and health training forms another significant percentage of programming, as interest in improving working conditions has grown greatly in recent years.

TUTA has suffered from the effects of rapid growth and a need to get a great many educational activities going in a relatively short period of time. It had to put together a sizeable faculty quickly in a country where no experienced people were available, while unsure about whether trade unionists or pedagogues would make the best teachers, and both types have been hired and there have been problems with both types. Clyde Cameron College was built in Albury-Wodonga at a time when the government was trying to de-centralize some government services into the country. It is remote from the two major labor centers, and the

community in which it is based tends to the Conservative side. Because of its remoteness from the major urban centers of Melbourne and Sydney, it is difficult to tempt high-quality faculty to re-locate there. Overall, however, TUTA has made a huge contribution during the past twelve years.

TUTA is now facing the same problem experienced elsewhere by labor educators — how to maintain its independence (if not its neutrality) from both the labor movement and potentially hostile government. During most of its existence, it worked under Liberal Party governments. But for the past several years, the Labour government has been in control, and the unions have had someone who listened carefully to what they have to say. The labor movement expects TUTA to help them push their objectives through training programs, especially where there are perceived differences between Labour government policies and the unions'. During periods of Liberal Party control, union leaders want to bash the government and boost the Labour Party. In either case, TUTA has to tread carefully to ensure its continued existence regardless of which party is in power. Since there is a strong ideological element to trade unionism in Australia, it must persuade different unions that it is capable of working in ways which are in their interest without becoming identified with particular wings of the labor movement. It must avoid direct political involvement and try to limit the extent to which the current government tries to use them as a propaganda apparatus, which is one of the criticisms leveled at the WEA in other countries.

TUTA's per capita government funding base for labor education is far and away among the most generous in the Western world, thanks to generous endowment by successive Liberal and Labour governments. The country's industrial relations system is beginning to change from one dominated by an arbitration award system to one similar to the U.S. collective bargaining/contract model. The U.S. industrial relations systems puts a great deal of responsibility upon the local labor leader to represent his/her membership effectively in a wide variety of ways, whereas in Australia considerable decision-making currently done by outside people. There is a movement to merge the several hundred small unions into a few larger ones, with one of the objectives being more stable labor relations within the enterprise. This "new labor relations" will require development of a labor leadership cadre that is able to deal with a new system in a sophisticated way. TUTA will play a key role in development of this leadership, thereby helping Australia to become an international competitor in production of goods and services, which they are not at the present time.

The Australian ACTU and state labour councils, while relying heavily on TUTA for delivery of worker education, has also chosen to support direct training by state labour councils for courses relating to occupational safety and health. The New South Wales Trade and Labour Council runs a government-funded safety and health training program which provides the major number of courses of that nature of training in the state, following a decision by TUTA to limit the amount of courses they wanted to offer. Individual unions continue to offer a limited amount of training for their membership directly. As is the case in all countries, there are unions which decline to use TUTA for training their leadership, for ideological or other reasons.

New Zealand

New Zealand is a lovely, green and very remote little Republic of about four and a half million souls that everyone would like to visit some day It has most recently earned publicity for its efforts to remain a nuclear-free zone, thereby incurring the wrath of the U.S. State Department, viewing this heresy as a threat to the ANZUS treaty.

Like Australia, New Zealand had a W.E.A. system during the early years of trade unionism, and resembling Australia's experience, it did not prosper well, although it lasted until 1986. The climate for more extensive worker education endeavors changed after the Lange Labour Government assumed power around 1985. The labor movement and the Ministry of Education set up a study commission which carefully studied other worker education systems around the Western world and came back with recommendations which, while borrowing some ideas from Australia and other countries, was more or less unique to New Zealand. Legislation establishing TUEA was passed in July, 1986 under provisions of the Union Representatives Education Leave Act (of) 1986.

Like Australia, New Zealand's labor movement is split into more than two hundred trade unions, only 87 of which have more than 1,000 members. One of the problems faced by unions of small size is a lack of resources to educate its leadership and provide technical support services to members. A primary objective of TUEA is to involve all 87 larger unions in educational activities. During its first year of existence, 57 of the 87 unions did run at least one education program on its own, and 21 full-time and four part-time education officers were employed by unions.

Instead of setting up a centralized worker education system as was done in Australia, the commission recommended that funding instead be provided to individual unions which would hire trainers, conduct classes, and be responsible for training under the supervision of the Trade Union Education Authority, which would fund, monitor and evaluate delivery of worker education classes run with government funding. Most importantly, the proposed Act provided that employers were required to provide a stipulated number of paid education leave days to their employees to attend classes, up to a maximum of 25,000 days per year total for the country (during year 1988-89), a not-insignificant number in a nation the size of New Zealand with an organized labor movement consisting of 600,000-plus members. Individual students enrolling in TUEA courses and classes could take up to a maximum of 5 days per year of paid education leave.

Enabling legislation went into effect in May, 1987, at the same time as unions and employers in New Zealand were exposed to radical changes in their industrial relations environment. The country began to feel the effects of the entrance of the United Kingdom into the European Common Market, which had the effect of taking away from New Zealand its primary lamb, mutton and wool market, Great Britain. Almost immediately the country began to have employment and international trade problems, and the Labour Government

quickly realized that the new worker education system could become a means by which trade unions and workers were made aware of the new circumstances in which New Zealand found itself.

The Authority is responsible for identifying theme areas which are to receive special attention during the forthcoming year. Themes included training in the Labour Relations and State Sector Acts, health and safety education, core leadership training, training of union educators, affirmative action programs for Maori and women union representatives, and pilot research studies to help unionists understand their industries and future prospects better.

These themes are then passed on to the unions for delivery. The Authority makes grants to individual unions each year to carry out agreed-upon programs, working through nine regional centers. TUEA is required to train union educators who in turn work with class participants. TUEA provides consultative services to those unions which have programs, and works to see that those unions which do not have programs themselves have access to necessary training.[6]

At the end of fiscal year 1987-88, TUEA reported that 57 out of 87 unions with a membership of over 1,000 were educationally active, an improvement over the first year in which TUEA existed. From practically none the previous year, New Zealand found itself with 21 full-time and four part-time worker educators employed by unions. 70% of all union-run courses were subsidized by TUEA during the year. Regional offices of TUEA present courses for unions unable to provide for themselves or which needed help with pilot programs. 26,100 paid leave days were used for TUEA-funded program attendance, below the authorized limit set forth in the original Act. A grand total of 880 courses with an attendance of 15,299 was reported for the year 1987-88. Approximately 50% of the courses dealt with basic union skills training, 25% information giving, and 25% was related to health and safety/equity issues.[7]

It is remarkable indeed to see how quickly a worker education system can get itself off and running with strong government support. Based on the idea that the New Zealand industrial relations system relies on the participation of informed, active, and democratic unions, it has speedily transformed the nature of worker education in a small country in two short years. TUEA is building itself an important role in the crucial next few years, in which New Zealand must transform itself and its labor force into an internationally competitive entity in order to hang on to its industrial and manufacturing infrastructure. While its shakedown period is still underway, the basic structure of TUEA appears to be sound. Its real test will be whether it can survive the next Conservative government.

The New Zealand university system has relatively little to do with adult and worker education, although the situation is changing at the moment. Trade unionists tend to regard the universities as handmaidens of the power structure, and view attempts to set up labor studies programs with suspicion. The University of Wellingtons Industrial Relations Center is headed by an

Australian with worker education experience, and it runs programs and engages in research activities in cooperation with both the employer and union sides. The University of Auckland has made an attempt to set up a Labour Studies Center, and has been trying to secure union support for it, thus far with limited success. Waikato University in Hamilton has just set up a Labour Studies Center to provide unions and employers with educational and research services.[8] The Center was established by a joint University/Trade Union Education Authority/Council of Trades Unions working party, and will consist of a Directorship and two joint faculty positions, plus a labor historian.

Another important activity was to try to get the polytechnic (adult and technical education) schools involved in providing training to their students about unions. By the end of the year twelve out of 24 polytechnics had advisory committees set up, and the Department of Education had approved two in-service seminars for polytechnic faculty members to they could learn how to provide information about unions.

TUEA was asked to develop and run a three-day course for training of union safety and health delegates during their first year of existence as a supplement to the recently-promulgated Code of Practice on Workplace Safety and Health. During the year, 39 programs were run for 643 participants by five health and safety centers associated with TUEA, and another 33 courses were run by unions and TUEA for 586 participants.

A total of 880 courses were run for 15,299 participants during TUEA's first year of existence, involving a total of 26,276 paid education leave days.[9] A remarkable achievement for so short an existence, and a testimonial to the foresight which underlay seeking legislation for paid educational leave.

TUEA is responsible for training union educators who deliver the bulk of programming. Starting its existence with less than five worker educators in the entire country, the Authority ran 11 training seminars for 222 participants, and published an educator's manual in cooperation with the School of Training for Trainers at the Wellington College of Education, authorized to run the advanced three-day workshop on teaching skills.

Another interesting undertaking authorized by the Commonwealth Trade Union Council was programming for union officers in other regional countries with which New Zealand has close relations. During its first year it was involved in activities with union officials from the Fiji Island and Western Samoa, and ran a regional workshop for trade unionists in New Zealand in October of 1988.

Discussion

Because of the willingness of Labour Governments in both Australia and New Zealand to set up trade union education systems using federal funds, both countries have been able, in a very short time, to set up systems which rival those of countries with long-established worker education programs. This generous funding has permitted the to reach relatively large numbers of trade unionists in a short period of time. The New Zealand system requires employers to release union people from their jobs and pay them education leave to attend classes. The Australian program provides travel payments and subsidies for room and board which enables even small unions to send students, even though distances are vast and air fares expensive.

Both Australia and New Zealand have labor education systems which have a regional outlook, and both offer programs for other Pacific Rim trade union movements. This enables them to help develop sophisticated trade union leadership in neighboring countries, many of which have Australian or New Zealand enterprises operating within their confines.

In both countries, there is a shortage of trained and experienced worker educators. New Zealand has set up a system for training newly appointed trainers. Australia has relied upon in-service training, or has hired pedagogues where they could find them with some union backgrounds. It will be a while before the "kinks" are ironed out of the systems, but their formation with federal funds should be an inspiration to American labor educators who must rely upon tuition payments and limited state funding.

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